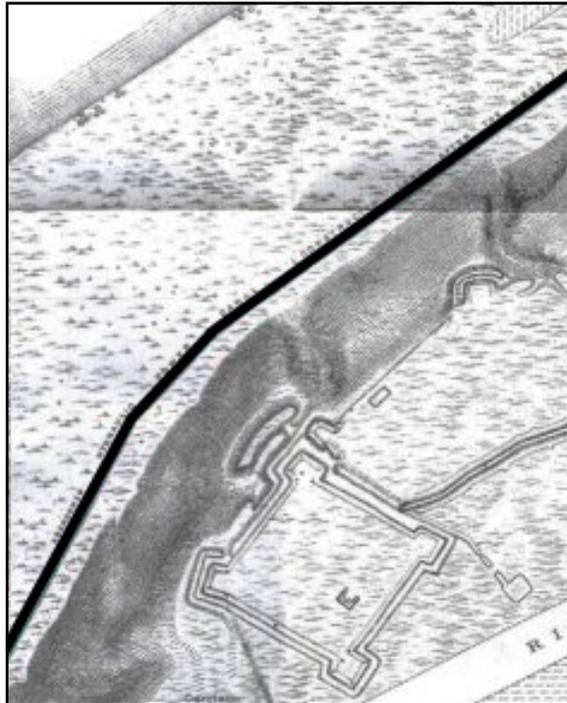


Way back in the 1850s, before electricity was in use, the Maumee River provided the power to run machinery used by Perrysburg business firms that produced goods and / or services.

The way it was done was by use of what was called the Hydraulic Canal -- more commonly known in town as the "Ditch".

Like grain-grinding mills of old that were built alongside a stream that turned a waterwheel connected to grinding stones, the Hydraulic Canal system operated in the same way. The difference between them was that the canal waterwheel was connected to an overhead wheel driven by leather belts. The driven wheel was mounted on a shaft extending throughout the manufacturing building. At various points along its length, secondary wheels were located to tap the rotational energy of the shaft and transfer it via a leather belt to machinery located below, including saws, lathes, and various grinding equipment.

Located down on the hillside above the waterfront, the canal consisted of a long ditch, or water chute, beginning a couple of miles above Buttonwood Park on West River Road where a partial dam was built across the river. This dam diverted water into an aqueduct that flowed into the man-made ditch which ran from there all the way to the foot of Louisiana Avenue, crossing Fort Meigs on the bluff (dark line on 1888 survey map on next panel).



Route of the Hydraulic Canal passing through Fort Meigs

The ditch was from 20 to 30 feet wide and water flowed down it at a depth of four to six feet. For about the last 3-1/2 miles the ditch had a fall of a foot per mile, increasing perceptibly toward its end. At the peak of the Hydraulic Canal use, this rushing water activated belt-driven machinery used by some eight to ten firms. They included a mill and furniture factory, a sawmill, a cider mill, a sorghum and a wool carding operation, a tannery, a foundry and machine shop, a paper mill and a flour mill. All of them were located down below Front Street on the riverbank.

The Hydraulic Canal Company was organized in 1837, but the "ditch" was not completed until 1849, the year of the California Gold Rush. It was paid for by the sale of shares of stock selling for \$25 each, and the townspeople voted for and paid a tax of four mills on the dollar to pay stockholders the interest on their stock.

The manufacturing houses deriving power from the Perrysburg hydraulic canal, in January, 1862, were Crook's cabinet shop, established in 1852; Lindsey's planing-mill and sash factory; Tefft's sawmill (producing 250,000 feet of lumber annually); Peter Witzler's cabinet shop, cider and sorghum-mill



Perrysburg Waterfront ca. 1860

and carding-mill; Hirth's tannery; G. W. Brown & Co.'s foundry and machine shop; the Perrysburg flouring-mill, and a paper-mill.

Four years after it began, the city of Perrysburg sold its ownership in the canal but over the next 22 years it flourished and then eventually suffered neglect. There was a continuous erosion of the banks of the ditch which re-

sulted in breaks and loss of water, and maintenance was a huge problem.

In 1874 the ditch was re-dug to a depth of nine feet and other necessary repairs and improvements made including construction of nine small bridges across it. But it still failed to live up to its high hopes, although it continued in operation. Several efforts were made in the early 1900s by private owners to use it to generate cheap electricity for public street lighting and for the electric trolley cars then operating here, but nothing really came of it. It lay unused except by village youngsters who enjoyed swimming in it in the summer and ice skating on it in the winter.

From Beer's 1897 History of Wood County, Ohio: *"The Hydraulic Canal was conceived by enterprise solely for the benefit of Perrysburg, and would have proved of incalculable advantage had the plan of construction provided against freshets, and the ownership against clouds in title. This waterway extended from the dam, two miles or more above Buttonwood island, to the foot of Louisiana avenue, or a distance of 5 1/4 miles. The width at the bottom was from 25 to 30 feet, and the depth varied from 4 to 6 feet. For about three miles it had a fall of 12 inches a mile, increasing perceptibly toward its end, and offering sufficient power to the eight manufacturing concerns, which were in operation along its banks forty-three years ago. The citizens were then paying four mills on the dollar to meet the interest on \$ 10,000 worth of bonds*

subscribed by them toward this improvement, and further granted the use of Water street to the Hydraulic Co. for right of way, During the early days of the Civil war, the town sold its interest in the canal, men's thoughts were directed toward war rather than toward internal improvement, and that waterway, which could have been made the basis for fifty great industries, was permitted to fall into decay. "

In 1907 there was a scramble to again buy stock in the canal based on rumors that it was to be revived for commercial purposes, but that "dream" never materialized.

And that was the end of the 70 year-old enterprise that helped Perrysburg industry get started. It was eventually filled in and is now under what is called Water Street.

The foundations of the old water diversion dam can be observed just below Presque Isle in the Maumee River and a short section of the canal itself is visible on the north side of Indian Hill where the Maumee and Western Reserve Road approaches the Fort Meigs Memorial Bridge.

Things You Should Know About Perrysburg, Ohio

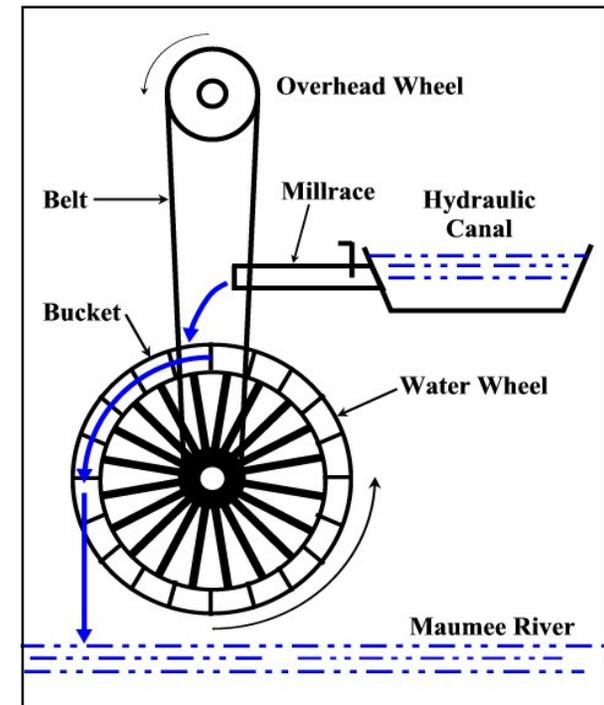
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